

Tips for Effective Grant Writing

Grants are provided for a reason. There is a goal or objective that the funder is trying to achieve. Grants are often provided by foundations, corporations, universities, and local, state and federal government sources. For federal funding alone, there are 26 federal grant-making agencies, 900 individual grant programs, and over \$350 billion in grants each year. But, there is a catch. Grant funds are to be utilized only to meet the specific goals, outcomes, and objectives of the funder. You cannot use grant funds for any other purpose other than dictated by the funder. Also, with federal funds, you can supplement existing programs and services, but you cannot supplant existing funding. When you apply for federal funds, you become a steward of taxpayer dollars. Your funder will want to make sure that you are committed to using those dollars in the best manner possible and that you understand that the funding belongs to the citizens.

Plan Ahead

Thoroughly read through the grant. You are looking for the BIG THREE: timelines, deadlines, and guidelines. Highlight every required item. Use these items to make a checklist that you will follow as you prepare the proposal. Be prepared to invest the time to collect resources, produce a tape, document capability, update a resume, collect letters, and include reference reports or whatever is needed. Guidelines will usually indicate:

- submission deadlines
- eligibility
- proposal format: award levels forms, margins, spacing, evaluation process and restrictions on the number criteria of pages, etc.
- review timetable
- budgets
- funding goals and priorities
- award levels
- evaluation process and criteria
- whom to contact
- other submission requirements

Identify the goals and outcomes of the grant. What is the funder aiming to accomplish with the funds supplied? The goals and objectives of the grant become "key words" that you should utilize throughout your proposal.

Grant reviewers evaluate

- Significance
- Approach
- Innovation
- Qualifications

- Past Performance
- Availability of Funds
- Goals
- Scope

Start with outcomes. One of the biggest mistakes nonprofits make in grant writing is not making their desired outcome absolutely clear. Your grant will start with a summary of your proposal, which is rarely more than a page long. This is where you'll outline the high points of your grant. It's crucial to be clear about the outcomes you desire to see from this project from the start. You'll need to match your outcomes as closely as possible with the goals of the funding source. Determine how you will measure the goals and outcomes. You need to define the methods you will use to determine if you are hitting the mark.

Determine resources needed. Do you have the staff and resources to meet the goals and outcomes identified? Some grants take several months before an initial payment is received. Do you have the existing capital to absorb costs until that first payment arrives?

What is the Return on your Investment? If it costs you \$5000 to receive \$4000, then there is not a good return on investment and the grant may not be right for your organization.

Take the grant seriously. Assume that competition is high. Write a succinct and complete grant. Assume that your funder knows nothing about your organization. Prove that you are the best organization for fulfilling the goals and outcomes identified by the funder. You may want to consider hiring a professional grant writer.

Be prepared to back up your statement of need with cold, hard facts, however a key element of writing a grant is persuasive writing. Remember the who, what, where, when, why and how approach:

- Who is your organization and how do you qualify to meet this need?
- Who is the population this proposal and your organization will serve?
- Who will you partner with? (Funders LOVE to see successful partnerships that leverage their funds.)
- Who will be performing the tasks you identify in your grant?
- Who will benefit and how?
- Who is the target audience, and how will you involve them in the activity? How many people do you intend to serve?
- What does the funder want you to do? Do your narrative and action steps meet that goal?
- What concern will be addressed and why is it important? What's the problem you are addressing? (Remember - the problem is not your need - it's the community's need!)
- What need does your proposal fill or what problem are you addressing?
- What specific objectives can be accomplished and how?
- What is the expected impact? What will change? - Increase, Decrease, Reduce

- What action(s) is necessary for achieving the goals? What are you proposing to do? - To provide, To establish, To create.
- What problems or barriers do you foresee? How will you overcome them?
- What are the qualifications and experience that make your program the right one to take on this work? (History, key accomplishments, qualifications of staff and volunteers, relationships in the community....as they relate to this project.)
- What resources do you already have? From whom? (Don't forget volunteers, donations and in kind services. Show the community participation in your project. Project the image that the funder is joining a winning team, not boarding a sinking boat!)
- Where will the tasks be completed?
- Where will my organization be in the future?
- When will the tasks be completed?
- Why are the tasks important in order to meet the goals?
- Why is the goal of the funder important?
- How will results be measured?
- How does this funding request relate to the funder's purpose, objectives, and priorities?
- How much will it cost?

Action Steps

Action Steps identify the process(es) that will lead to the intended outcome.

Action Steps must:

- specify actions taken by the organization to fulfill a specific outcome.
- be reasonable within the context and timeframe of the project.
- achieve the goals, objectives, and outcomes specified.

Actions Steps can:

- be process-oriented (i.e., clients will receive ...; clients will develop ...).
- provide additional clarification of the intended outcome.

Remember to be "SMART":

Specific - **precise**: precise and detailed, avoiding vagueness

- Well defined
- Clear to anyone that has a basic knowledge of the project

Not Specific - Serve dinner

Specific – Serve a nutritionally balanced meal at 6:00 pm every evening to John, Mary, Jane and Laura. The meal will include a vegetable salad, a bread item, a protein (meat), three vegetables (e.g. broccoli, beans, corn, etc.) and one low-fat dessert.

M measurable - **able to be measured: capable of being measured or perceived**

- Know if the goal is obtainable and how far away completion is
- Know when it has been achieved

Not measurable – I will lose weight.

Measurable – I will lose 5 pounds before December 31st, 2009.

A attainable - **accomplish something: to achieve a goal or desired state, usually with effort**

- Know if the goal is obtainable and how far away completion is
- Know when it has been achieved

Not attainable – I will become President of the United States on January 16th, 2013.

Attainable – I will run for the public office of President in the next primary election to be held on May 12th, 2013.

R relevant - **connected – having social significance: having some sensible or logical connection with something else such as a matter being discussed or investigated.**

- Demonstrates impact
- Demonstrates purpose
- Achieves the objective identified

Not Relevant – I will serve him a meal each day.

Relevant – I will serve him a well-balanced and nutritional meal based on recommended dietary guidelines that will lower his cholesterol by 8% before the end of the calendar year, thus increasing his life expectancy and quality of life.

Time Bound - **occurring at a specific time within a specific time frame**

- Bound to a specific time frame or completion date
- Enough time to achieve the goal
- Not too much time, which can affect project performance

Not timely – I will sell three calendars to customers.

Timely – I will sell three calendars to customers on or before the close of business, June 15th, 2009.

Example of Action Steps

Goal: Implement an after school program for children ages 5 to 13 years of age.

1. **Develop school age focus group** – We will organize a focus group of school age children to identify activities that they would like to see in an after school program – Date of completion May 3rd, 2005.
2. **Develop a formal program activity implementation plan.** This plan will include activities identified in the focus group, costs for those activities, resources needed for those activities, feasibility of those activities, and qualifications of persons needed to conduct those activities – Date of completion June 1st, 2005.
3. **Identify program capacity** – Based upon funding available, activities required, resource limitation, building capacity, and partnerships needed, we will set the limits for participation including minimum number of students needed for the program to be successful and maximum number of students that can be enrolled in the program – Date of completion June 8th, 2005.
4. **Engage Partner Organizations** – We will engage the following partner organizations that have already committed to assisting in this project by:

Developing a formal written Memorandum of Understanding with the YMCA After School Program that clearly identifies the activities to be performed, the date of those activities, the purpose of those activities – Date of completion June 15th, 2005.

Develop a formal written Memorandum of Understanding with the School District to arrange for after school busing of students from their home school to the YMCA – Date of completion July 8th, 2005.
5. **Implement media campaign** – We will conduct a media campaign through the newspaper, the local radio stations, a newsletter, a parent mailing and a TV advertisement targeted at the parents of school age children in grades K through 6 that explains the program, the cost of the program, the site of the program, transportation to and from the program, program dates, and program activities – Date of completion August 1st, 2005.
6. **Register clients** – We will register clients based on the media campaign by conducting an in-house registration with a registration form, record of immunizations, school information, parent contact information, and days of participation. Registration will be limited to the number of students determined in Step 3. For additional students, we will start a waiting list – Date of completion August 14th, 2005.
7. **Start Program** – The program will begin on August 27th, 2005. This is the first date of school in our district.

8. **Measure effectiveness** – We will measure the effectiveness of the program on December 31, 2005 by analyzing the following:
 - a. Number of students enrolled – Increase, Decline, Students on Waiting List
 - b. Parent satisfaction survey
 - c. Cost analysis – profit and loss
 - d. Engaging students from Step 1 focus group to determine if activities are successful, needed, warranted and entertaining.

9. **Implement needed changes** – Based upon the results of the measurements in Step 8, we will make the necessary changes in order to keep the program viable – Date of completion January 31st, 2006.

Performance Measurement

All Performance Measures that have ever existed in the history of the universe involve answering two sets of interlocking questions:

- How Much did we do? (#)
- How Well did we do it? (%)
- Effort - How hard did we try?
- Effect - Is anyone better off?

Specifications

Tailor proposal writing to specifications found in the guidelines. Include only the number of pages allowed. Observe the format. Is there a form to complete? Must the proposal be typed, double spaced, on 8-1/2 x 11 inch pages? Are cover pages allowed or desired? Caution! — The beautifully bound proposal is not always appreciated or allowed. Be concise. Elaborations should add depth and scope, not page fillers. Be prepared to write more than one draft.

Funders don't want to see the pebble you through in the water, they want to see the ripple effect afterward. What impact will you be making as you work the action steps you identify? Remember, your proposal isn't just an idea, it is a contractual commitment between you and the funding organization and you will have to meet every requirement the funder has and every item that you say you will complete.

Organizing your Thoughts

- Write a clear statement of need.
- Write clear and concise goals and objectives.
- Include your methodology and your plan for evaluating your success.

- Consider where else you might receive funding.
- Spend time thinking about your budget.
- Consider who might provide a good reference or support for the project and ask that person/organization to create a letter of support (do this in advance!).

Write clearly. Watch out for another common grant writing mistake: unclear writing. Remember, you're not writing to subject matter experts here; you're writing to grant making agencies with employees who may or may not understand your jargon and technical terms. Make sure your language is well-organized and easy to understand; and that your grant's headline is both descriptive and catchy.

Be enthusiastic. A dull proposal will not catch anyone's eye.

Budgets

Budgets are cost projections. They are also a window into how projects will be implemented and managed. Well-planned budgets reflect carefully thought-out projects. Be sure to only include those things the funder is willing to support.

Funders use these factors to assess budgets:

- Can the job be accomplished with this budget?
- Are costs reasonable for the market - or too high or too low?
- Is the budget consistent with proposed activities?
- Is there sufficient budget detail and explanation?

Many funders provide mandatory budget forms that must be submitted with the proposal.

Don't forget to list in-kind support and matching revenue, where appropriate. Be flexible about your budget in case the funder chooses to negotiate costs.

Supporting Materials

Supporting materials are often arranged in an appendix or attachments. These materials may endorse the project and the applicant, provide certifications, add information about project personnel and consultants, exhibit tables and charts, etc. For projects that include collaborations or partnerships, include endorsements from the partnering agencies.

Authorized Signatures

Authorized signatures are required. Without these, proposals may be rejected. Be sure to allow yourself time to acquire a needed signature.

Format Matters

Illustrate your idea with formatting that makes your concepts easy to read and understand. Include graphs and charts where applicable; use bolded subheads and bullet points; and make sure your document is easy to read and understand. The more you make it easy for agencies to understand your concepts at a glance, the more your ideas will shine through. In addition, make sure you're following any formatting guidelines the agency puts forward.

Letters of Intent

Many funders require that one is submitted prior to accepting a full proposal. Typically, it should include:

- Introduction
- Description of organization
- Statement of need
- Methodology
- Other funding sources
- Final summary

Requests for Proposal (RFP)

A RFP is an invitation from a funder to submit applications on a specified topic with specified purposes. It is generally a written application based on specifications.

Stewardship

When you apply for funds, you become a steward of those funds and you have responsibility for taking good care of resources entrusted to you. You are taking responsibility for the survival and well-being of something that is valued. There is a science, art and skill of responsible and accountable management of resources. Do you have the skill set needed to maintain proper stewardship? Do you have resources to assist you with this goal? Remember; ALWAYS be a good steward of your funds and of your relationship with your funder!

Do it right the first time

Set a writing schedule and stick to it. Be sure to gather feedback on drafts as you go. We suggest using someone to proof for grammar and someone to proof for content. Have a person that knows nothing about your organization review your grant. Can they "get there from here" based upon your proposal? If they don't understand how your proposal will meet the objectives identified, chances are that a grant review panel won't as well.

To Wrap it up

Proposal Basics

As you research potential funders, you will sometimes encounter that tricky situation - a donor who specifies: "No application form is required, submit proposal." What proposal!?! you scream (but only out of hearing of the donor!) Well, a complete proposal has basic and time-honored elements - and here they are!

Note that when a brief proposal or letter is specified, you want to try to hit most of these points as well - only in a more abbreviated way.

Cover Letter

- No more than one page.
- Organization (who you are and your background briefly), purpose of funding, and the amount of your request should appear in the first paragraph.
- Include a contact name, phone number and address.

Proposal Summary

- Limit to one page.
- State the organization making the request and link organizational background to the proposal purpose.
- State your project purpose.
- Briefly state how your project will be implemented.
- State the results you expect from your project.
- Include your total budget amount, other funds that are committed and the amount of your request.

90% of funding decisions by private donors and foundations will be made by the time the funder finishes reading this page. It must be concise, compelling, and clear!

Introduction to the Organization

- History
- General Purpose
- Goals and objectives as they relate to this project, and in overview, as they provide a context for the work you want to undertake.
- Accomplishments, especially as they relate to this project or to your capacity to provide this project.
- Service areas and population served.

Statement of Problem or Need

- Use a funnel approach.
- Start with the generalized problem as it occurs in your community.
- Move to the conditions which make this a problem.

- Outline current resources that address this problem and identify gaps in those resources.
- Identify how your proposal will fill these gaps.

Project Goals and Objectives

- What specific goals are you trying to achieve?
- What measurable milestones will you reach in meeting those goals?
- How will you and the funder know that you are making progress towards your goals?

Methods and Schedule

- What actions will you take to achieve your goals?
- What steps must you take to achieve success?
- Who will do what? (Include here job descriptions and background statements of staff or the qualifications you will seek in staff for the project. This is true even if "staff" will actually be volunteers.)
- When will these actions take place?

Evaluation Criteria and Process

- How will you know whether you are achieving your goals?
- What will you measure to evaluate your progress?
- What records and information will you keep to allow you to measure your progress?

Budget

- More detail is better than less.
- Don't round out if possible. Use bids and estimates whenever you can get them - even if they are informal quotes.
- Don't pad your budget. Competent reviewers will know the cost of goods and services, and will understand prevailing wages. If they know you are trying to deceive them on budget, what else will they suspect you of trying to deceive them about?
- Do include all sources of support - including volunteer time, donated space and borrowed equipment. Don't shortchange the contribution your community is making to your project.

Resources:

Grant proposal writing tips: <http://www.cpb.org/grants/grantwriting.html>

Basics of grant writing:

<http://www.case.edu/artsci/funding/resources/documents/Grantwritingpresentation-nonotes.ppt>

The Basics of Grant Writing for Nonprofits: How to Get the Money: <http://www.distance-education.org/Articles/The-Basics-of-Grant-Writing-for-Nonprofits--How-to-Get-the-Money-67.html>

Grant Writing Tips: <http://www.seanet.com/~sylvie/grants.htm>

Formulating Action Steps: <http://www.core.tcu.edu/documents/FormulatingActionSteps.pdf>